

LETTER I.

LOMBARD AND GOTHIC
ARCHITECTURE.

IN the preceding Letters, I have attempted to give you some idea of the Christian Art of Greece and Rome, the aged sovereigns of the elder world; in these that follow, I shall do my best to show you how their heirs, the youthful Europeans, availed themselves of the legacy, threw their own glowing life into the ideas and forms thus bequeathed to them, and either combined them afresh, or created new ones out of the riches of Nature and of their own Souls.

I shall divide the ensuing Series into five grand divisions or periods,—the First, and of longest duration, extending from the middle of the sixth to the middle of the fifteenth century, during which Spirit, or Christianity, ruled supreme, and found its chief expression in Architecture,—the Second, embracing the latter half of the fifteenth century, during which Christianity battled with the pride of Intellect and resuscitated paganism, while Sculpture was perfected

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in the struggle,—the Third, extending from the close of the fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century, which witnessed the results of the struggle, good and bad, in the successive triumphs of Spirit, Intellect, and Sense, Expression, Design, and Colouring, in Painting, the peculiar handmaid and exponent of Christianity,—the Fourth, expiring with the eighteenth century, signalised by the various attempts to regenerate Art through Sense and Intellect, Colour and Design,—and the Fifth and last, dating from the commencement of the present century, characterised by a similar revival through Spirit, or Expression, and a recurrence to first principles, to the Christianity and Nationality of Romano-Teutonic Europe.

The rise and progress of Sculpture and Painting will of course demand their due consideration under the first as under the later of these periods; meanwhile it is to the development and character of the Lombard and Pointed, or Gothic Architecture, both in Italy and the North, that I address myself in the present Letter.

SECTION 1. *Lombard Architecture, South and North of the Alps.*

I need not remind you that the freedom of the North, the civilization of the South, and the Christianity of the East, are the three elements from the commixture of which the character and history of Europe spring, and that Italy was the field where

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those elements first met, and began to amalgamate.*

The invasion of the Lombards, in 568, may be considered as the last preliminary step to this consummation. They were a noble race, of pure morals, and bold, manly, generous and even romantic character, presenting the strongest possible contrast to the corrupt and degenerate Romans, whom they held personally in utter contempt, and refused to mingle with on the familiar footing of their predecessors, the Goths. It was therefore from the Church rather than the natives of Rome and Italy that they derived their civilization, and to the Popes accordingly they paid a free but a zealous deference, which rendered them invaluable adherents in any course of policy the latter might find it expedient to pursue.

The Papacy, at the commencement of the seventh century, was in a very different position from that in which Constantine had left her. In doctrine, indeed, she was but little changed, for almost every peculiar dogma of Catholicism had been either openly asserted, or indirectly implied, before the close of the fourth century. But during the last three hundred years the seed of spiritual despotism, wrapt up in the acorn of the Nicene Church, had silently but rapidly shot up into a mighty tree, and before the death of the First Gregory not only had the theory been matured and the principles laid down by which ecclesiastical supremacy was to be claimed and established

* Influentially, I mean, on the future; the civilization of the Visigoths in Spain was earlier, but led to nothing.

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over the Kings of the earth, but the minds of men had been prepared to acquiesce in the usurpation. An opportunity for asserting that supremacy was not long in presenting itself.

The propriety of the adoration of images, an abuse at that time of almost universal prevalence in Christendom, had been long agitated in the Greek Church. In 726, the Emperor Leo III. declared it unlawful by a special edict, which he followed up by an indiscriminate destruction of images throughout his Eastern dominions, calling at the same time on the Popes in Italy, his subject province, to follow his example of reformation. Gregory II., then occupant of the papal chair, refused obedience, and, finding his remonstrances unattended to, proceeded—under the sanction of a decree subscribed by a synod of ninety-three Italian bishops, and backed by the ready swords of the Lombards—to excommunicate in one sweeping anathema, the whole body of the Iconoclasts, the Emperor himself not excepted, and to pronounce Italy politically independent of the Byzantine Empire. It was a step, before God and man alike, indefensible—at once schismatical and rebellious. But—from that hour a new star dawned on the horizon, infant Europe was separated from the womb, life awoke in her, the warm blood was sent thrilling through her veins, that impulse was communicated to which she owes her growth and development, her virtue and her glory—a crime was, in short, overruled by providence to the good of mankind.

The results of the measure were not so imme-

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diately apparent as might have been expected. The revolution was peaceably effected. Greece, after a short struggle, acquiesced in it, and long continued to retain her maritime dependencies, and even a nominal supremacy in the peninsula, the policy of the Popes leaving a shadow of power to the Emperors, after securing the substance to themselves. Under their rule in the South, and that of the Lombards North of the Apennines, and after the extinction of the latter dynasty, under that of Charlemagne and his Carlovingian successors, Italy enjoyed repose and tranquillity till the middle of the ninth century, when a period of anarchy and misery ensued for a hundred and fifty years.

It is from the settlement of the Lombards and the Iconoclast rupture therefore, and not from the reign of Charlemagne, that the life of Modern Europe, civil and ecclesiastical, properly dates,* and we find accordingly in the Lombard Architecture and Sculpture, the earliest voice and expression of that life—witnessed in the former by new combinations and a more ample development of the spirit of symbolism—in the latter by a profusion of imagery, remarkable even before the quarrel, but absolutely redundant after

* See for the character of the Lombards, Gibbon, chap. 45, and for the Iconoclast rupture, chap. 49.—“La conquête des Lombards,” says Sismondi, “fut, en quelque sorte, pour l’Italie, l’époque de la renaissance des peuples. Des principautés indépendantes, des communautés, des républiques, commencèrent à se constituer de toutes parts; et un principe de vie fut rendu à cette contrée, long-temps ensevelie dans un sommeil léthargique.”—*Hist. des Republ. Ital.* tom. i, p. 9.

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it. We will discuss these sculptures in a future letter; meanwhile I shall describe as briefly as possible the principal characteristics of the new architecture, as exhibited in the Lombard Cathedral.

These characteristics are of various origin, but easily discriminated. The three most prominent features, the eastern aspect of the sanctuary, the cruciform plan, and the soaring octagonal cupola, are borrowed from Byzantium, the latter in an improved form, the cross with a difference, the nave, or arm opposite the sanctuary, being lengthened so as to resemble the supposed shape of the actual instrument of suffering, and form what is now distinctively called the Latin Cross. The crypt and absis, or tribune, are retained from the Roman basilica, but the absis is generally pierced with windows, and the crypt is much loftier and more spacious, assuming almost the appearance of a subterranean church. The columns of the nave, no longer isolated, are clustered so as to form compound piers, massive and heavy—their capitals either a rude imitation of the Corinthian, or, especially in the earlier structures, sculptured with grotesque imagery.* Triforia, or galleries for women, frequently line the nave and transepts. The roof is of stone, and vaulted. The narthex, or portico, for excluded penitents, common alike to the Greek and Roman churches, and in them continued along the whole facade of entrance, is dispensed with

* Sometimes indeed, but rarely, the insulated column of the early church is restored.

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altogether in the oldest Lombard ones,* and when afterwards resumed, in the eleventh century, was restricted to what we should now call Porches, over each door, consisting generally of little more than a canopy open at the sides, and supported by slender pillars, resting on sculptured monsters. Three doors admit from the western front; these are generally covered with sculpture, which frequently extends in belts across the façade, and even along the sides of the building. Above the central door is usually seen, in the later Lombard churches, a S. Catherine's-wheel window. The roof slants at the sides, and ends in front, sometimes in a single pediment, sometimes in three gables answering to the three doors; while, in Lombardy at least, hundreds of slender pillars, of every form and device—those immediately adjacent to each other frequently interlaced in the true lover's knot, and all supporting round or trefoil arches—run along, in continuous galleries, under the eaves, as if for the purpose of supporting the roof—run up the pediment in front, are continued along the side-walls and round the eastern absis, and finally engirdle the cupola. Sometimes the western front is absolutely covered with these galleries, rising tier above tier. Though introduced merely for ornament, and therefore on a vicious principle, these fairy-like colonnades win very much on one's affections. I may add to these general

* A significant fact, and prophetic of the tendency and the destinies of the Medo-Persian or Teutonic *versus* the Hindoo element of Europe.

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features the occasional and rare one, seen to peculiar advantage in the cathedral of Cremona, of numerous slender towers, rising, like minarets, in every direction, in front and behind, and giving the east end, especially, a marked resemblance to the mosques of the Mahometans.

The Baptistry and the Campanile, or bell-tower, are in theory invariable adjuncts to the Lombard cathedral, although detached from it. I have already noticed these buildings, as well as the principal churches built by the Lombards in the old basilica form, under the head of Latin architecture. But I may remark, that the Lombards seem to have built them with peculiar zest, and to have had a keen eye for the picturesque in grouping them with the churches they belong to.

I need scarcely add, that the round arch is exclusively employed in pure Lombard architecture.*

To translate this new style into its symbolical language is a pleasurable task.

The three doors and three gable ends signify the Trinity, the Catherine-wheel window (if I mistake not) the Unity, as concentrated in Christ, the Light of the Church, from whose Greek monogram its shape was probably adopted.† The monsters that support the pillars of the porch stand there as talismans to frighten away evil spirits. The crypt (as in older buildings) signifies the moral death of man, the cross

* See, on the subject of the Lombard style, the twenty-second and following chapters of Mr. Hope's 'Historical Essay.'

† *Vide supra*, tom. i, p. 103, *note*.

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the atonement, the cupola heaven; and these three, taken in conjunction with the lengthened nave, express, reconcile, and give their due and balanced prominence to the leading ideas of the Militant and Triumphant Church, respectively embodied in the architecture of Rome and Byzantium. Add to this, the symbolism of the Baptistery, and the Christian pilgrimage, from the Font to the Door of heaven, is complete.*

* I have confined myself in the text to the popular symbolism, the broad outline, but there was a deeper and more abstruse theory current during the early ages, and which has never perhaps been completely realised. I have nowhere seen it so fully and succinctly stated as by M. Alfred Maury in his 'Essai sur les Légendes Pieuses du Moyen-âge,' p. 107:—"Les églises étaient tournées du côté de l'Orient, par allusion à la naissance du Sauveur. . . . Elles étaient placées sur des lieux élevés, comme emblème de la supériorité divine et comme l'intermédiaire entre le ciel et la terre. ('Nostræ columbæ domus simplex, etiam in editis semper et apertis et ad lucem.' *Tertull. adv. Valent.* c. 2.) Elles comprenaient quatre parties: le portique, la nef, le chœur et le sanctuaire, emblèmes de la vie pénitente, de la vie chrétienne, de la vie sainte et de la vie céleste. En effet, à la porte se trouvaient les pénitents, appelés *audientes*, écoutant, et *prostrati*, prosternés, qui étaient étendus par terre, pendant qu'on faisait la prière sur eux, et qu'on faisait sortir avant l'offrande. Puis venaient les consistants, *consistentes*, qui assistaient dans la nef au divin office, mais sans y participer, droit qui appartenait seulement aux *participantes*. L'*ambo* ou chœur était plus élevé que la nef, comme marquant un degré de vie plus parfait. C'était là que se plaçaient les clercs. L'église avait quatre portes, deux du côté de la nef, nommées *speciosæ portæ*, symbole de la vie terrestre, et deux du côté de la nef, appelées *portæ sanctæ* symbole de la vie céleste. Le sanctuaire, accessible au seul clergé, était séparé du chœur par un chancel ou balustrade, qui empêchait les laïques d'y entrer, et exprimait, d'une façon mystique, la barrière qui sépare le ciel de la terre, et ne s'ouvre que pour celui qui est

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Lombard Architecture may thus be likened to a lovely and graceful maiden, in whose countenance the lineaments of both her parents, the high-spirited but practical father, the lofty-souled contemplative mother, are equally recognisable, while those of the latter predominate—yet both are softened and reconciled into harmony by an expression and refinement unborrowed and her own.

It may strike you at first as a discrepancy, that at

mort au monde, comme est celui qui se consacre au service des autels. Dans les représentations qui décoraient l'église, la gauche se rapportait à la vie présente, la droite à la vie future. La forme de croix donnée à l'édifice était l'image du Sauveur, l'abside ou chevet indiquait la place où reposait sa tête, les transept formaient les bras, les chapelles placées à l'entour de l'abside étaient peut-être les symboles des rayons de l'auréole. Au reste, les églises furent d'abord construites sur le plan des temples de Salomon et de Zorobabel, qui présentaient déjà une disposition toute mystique, (Cf. *Euseb. Hist. Eccles.* lib. x, c. 4), et avaient dans leur distribution des rapports généraux avec l'univers. *Philonis Vit. Mosis*, lib. 3, c. 2.—*Joseph. Antiq. Jud.* lib. viii, c. 8.—Cf. *Dupuis, Orig. de tous les Cultes*, tom. i, p. 179. Les trois parties principales du temple, le parvis, le saint et le saint des saints répondaient à la terre, à la mer et au ciel. Dans les cathédrales, les roses représentaient aussi les élémens, comme à celle d'Amiens, par exemple. *Gilbert, Descr. de la Cath. d'Amiens*, p. 71. Au midi est la rose qui figure le ciel, l'air, et qui est peinte en rouge; on voit dans les compartiments des archanges et des chérubins. A l'ouest est celle de l'eau ou de la mer; les compartiments offrent des coquillages et des dauphins. Au nord est celle des vents.—C'était principalement le portail ou parvis des églises qui était décoré, ainsi qu'on peut le voir encore dans toutes les cathédrales, de représentations tirées de l'Histoire Sainte et de statues de Saints. . . Le portail des églises offrait . . l'image du paradis, *paradisus*, nom qui fut donné pour cette raison sans doute à l'aire du portail, et qui fut changé plus tard, par corruption, en celui de *parvisium*, parvis."